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SUBJECT: MARKING THE BLUE LINE: SLOW BUT STEADY PROGRESS

REF: BEIRUT 512

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The UN Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) 121-kilometer Blue Line (BL) marking program is moving along, albeit slowly, with 25 of the proposed 198 markers now in place. UNIFIL officials maintain that despite the slow pace, the demarcation prevents inadvertent violations of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 and helps resolve those that do occur swiftly and peacefully, thus contributing to stability on Lebanon's southern border. They explained that the pace of the multi-step BL marking program, initiated in 2007, is constrained by operational processes requiring precision and three-party consensus. The current "de facto" BL border delineation rests on the best available data compiled from 1923 French and British Mandate maps and the 1949 Lebanon-Israel Armistice Demarcation Line. The viability of the BL as a mutually recognized border in the future is unclear given the lack of an permanent cease-fire agreement between Israel and Lebanon. End Summary.

THE BLUE LINE IS NOT A BORDER

¶2. (U) In May 2000 the UN, through UNIFIL, took up the task of identifying a line for the purpose of certifying complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, as called for in UNSCRs 425 and 426. While Lebanon, Israel, and UNIFIL agreed the result would not be considered a formal border demarcation, the aim was to identify a line that closely conformed to the internationally recognized boundaries of Lebanon, based on the best available cartographic and other documentary evidence. This line, formally called the Line of Withdrawal, subsequently came to be known as the Blue Line.

¶3. (U) Much of the Israeli-Lebanese border is not disputed and was clearly marked on French and British Mandate maps developed by the Occupied Enemy Territorial Administration (OETA) following World War I. The line separating the two mandates ran eastward from Ra's Naqoura on the Mediterranean, more or less horizontally, terminating just north of the Upper Galilee at Jisr al-Ghajar. A joint British-French border commission report marking the border was approved in 1923, several months before the countries assumed their mandatory responsibilities, and 38 boundary markers were placed along the 49-mile-long boundary. Previous Lebanese governments have recognized the legitimacy of the southern border with Israel on many occasions, including in 1949 when

the "Armistice Demarcation Line" (ADL) was established between the two states. The ADL (also known as the Green Line) corresponded to the 1923 Mandate border, and the armistice agreement contained no clause denying that the existing border was an international border. The ADL was thereafter treated as the "de jure" international border.

A PENNY OF PREVENTION  
WORTH A POUND OF CURE  
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¶4. (SBU) "A Blue Line-marking program is a critical step in implementing UNSCR 1701," declared Roxaneh Bazergan, UNIFIL Political Officer for the Tripartite Secretariat, in a November 13 update to the diplomatic corps. To emphasize her point, Bazergan related several recent incidents, such as farmers mistaking the border line, animal herds wandering from one country to the other, and a mentally handicapped Israeli nearly sparking a confrontation by crossing into Lebanon. Bazergan recounted that after the cessation of hostilities between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hizballah in 2006, UNIFIL commanders determined that successful implementation of UNSCR 1701 would be eased if unintentional violations of the unmarked BL could be prevented. Subsequently, UNIFIL embarked on visibly delineating the BL using 198 prominent points.

CURRENT BLUE LINE SNAPSHOT  
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¶5. (SBU) As of June 2009, Bazergan stated, 36.5 km of 121 km had been demarcated, with work going on simultaneously in all four predetermined sectors. Of the 198 proposed BL points, 25 barrels marking completed points have now been erected, 20

are under construction, 18 more coordinates are agreed upon by all parties, and 6 proposed coordinates are under evaluation. The IDF has nearly completed construction of a "technical fence" in Israeli territory south of the BL, Bazergan explained, to warn those approaching from inside Israeli territory that they were approaching the BL. Conversely, reaching this same fence from Lebanon in the north would signify that the BL has been crossed in clear violation of UNSCR 1701. Bazergan added that the LAF, assisted by UNIFIL engineers, has begun construction of a road paralleling the BL on the north. UNIFIL and the LAF both believe the road essential to responding rapidly to border incidents, she said, and it would also facilitate routine patrolling.

CENTRIMETRIC PRECISION REQUIRED  
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¶6. (SBU) Bazergan emphasized that UNIFIL's BL marking program rests on four factors to achieve undisputed results:

- Digital coordinates are logged using a Global Positioning System (GPS) device.
- Measurements are presented in centimeters for "centrimetric precision."
- UNIFIL proposes the final points to the two other parties.
- No point is decided without consensus from all sides.

The marking process moves at a glacial pace because of the centrimetric precision and consensus requirements, Bazergan pointed out.

¶7. (SBU) When the initial staking process began in 2007, all parties worked together on the ground, Bazergan related. This mechanism initially built confidence, but it fell apart after the IDF began to include additional security personnel. The coordinate marking process is now done by separate LAF and IDF teams with UNIFIL oversight in the following sequence:

- Both sides create access to the planned points by clearing

vegetation and demining the area.

-- The LAF proposes initial coordinates extracted from historical sources.

-- The IDF and UNIFIL mark their respective points. All parties must achieve measurements within 50 cm of each other. Coordinate stakes are marked blue for UNIFIL, yellow for the IDF, and red/white for the LAF.

-- UNIFIL proposes a final "barycenter" or agreed upon coordinate, based on the three stakes, and a concrete base is constructed over the barycenter. The base's center must fall within a one-meter radius of the barycenter coordinate. Due to uneven terrain, base heights range from one to three meters to increase visibility from a distance.

-- All three parties verify the base center, and a blue barrel is placed on it to mark completion.

Blue Line demarcation cannot resolve some intractable problems, Bazergan pointed out, citing the complications related to UNIFIL's proposal for the IDF's withdrawal from northern Ghajar (reftel).

WHAT IS THE BLUE LINE'S FUTURE?

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18. (SBU) Bazergan could not predict when the demarcation process will be completed, but she underscored that the marking program contributes to stability in the south and its completion will be a milestone in the successful implementation of UNSCR 1701, despite slow progress. She also declined to assess if the BL would be considered a "de facto" border if and when UNIFIL departed, and she stressed that the lack of a permanent cease-fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel, as well as Hizballah's presence on the southern border, complicates the negotiation of one.

Nevertheless, she underscored, UNIFIL's efforts to mark the BL will lessen unintentional violations of UNSCR 1701.

DAUGHTON